

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-07 SP-02 SS-14 RSC-01 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1121

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

USSAG

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 7743

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, EAID, MASS, LA

SUBJECT: TALK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK

1. I MET WITH DEFMIN SISOUK TODAY AND REVIEWED VARIOUS MATTERS WHICH HAD COME UP IN HIS ABSENCE.

2. DISTURBANCE IN BAN HOUEI SAI. SISOUK TOLD ME HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED ON THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY DISSIDENT SOLDIERS IN BAN HOUEI SAI AND ASKED ME FOR MY OPINION OF THE SITUATION THERE. I SAID THAT IN MY VIEW THE SOLDIERS SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED TO HAVE MUTINIED. THEIR GRIEVANCES SEEM TO BE THOROUGHLY JUSTIFIED. IT WAS CLEAR THAT THEY HAD NOT BEEN PAID IN RECENT MONTHS AND THAT THEIR RICE RATIONS WERE NOT ARRIVING IN A TIMELY WAY. IN ADDITION, THE GOVERNOR AND LOCAL COMMANDER WERE NOTORIOUSLY INCOMPETENT AND CORRUPT. I TOLD SISOUK THAT WHILE MANY LEADERS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE WERE CONCERNED OVER POSSIBLE ACTIONS THE PATHET LAO MIGHT TAKE, SOME OF THIS CONCERN SHOULD BE DIRECTED AT THE INJUSTICES AND MISDEMEANORS OF THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN BUREAUCRACY OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE. THE KIND OF THING WHICH HAD HAPPENED IN HOUEI SAI COULD EASILY BE REPEATED ELSEWHERE AS THE

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SOLDIERS' GRIEVANCES WERE APPLICABLE NATIONWIDE. SISOUK AGREED

THAT THE SITUATION IN MANY AREAS WAS VERY UNSATISFACTORY AND AGREED THAT MANY SENIOR OFFICERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM OFFICE. HE HAD TRIED TO REMOVE THE HOUEI SAI COMMANDER LAST YEAR BUT THERE HAD BEEN A SQUALL OF PROTESTS FROM VARIOUS POLITICIANS AND HE HAD TO ALLOW THIS OFFICER TO REMAIN ON DUTY. WHILE AGREEING WITH MY ESTIMATE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION, SISOUK SEEMED RESIGNED TO THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DOING ANY HOUSECLEANING.

3. PHOUMI'S SPEECH AT THE UN. SISOUK ASKED ME WHETHER WE HAD RECEIVED ANY CONFIRMATION OF THE REPORT THAT PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA HAD IN FACT APPROVED FONMIN PHOUMI'S SPEECH AT THE UN. HE FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SOUVANNA HAD AGREED TO THE PASSAGES TO WHICH THE VIENTIANE SIDE OBJECTED. PHOUMI HAD PLAYED A VERY SLY AND DIRTY TRICK WHICH WOULD BE RESENTED FOR A LONG TIME. I TOLD SISOUK THAT WE HAD NO INDEPENDENT INFORMATION ON WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE DURING THE PHOUMI-SOUVANNA MEETING IN GRASSE.

4. COMMUNIST AID. I TOLD SISOUK THAT I DID NOT THINK THE VIENTIANE SIDE HAD THOUGHT OUT VERY CAREFULLY THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN RECEIVING WHAT MIGHT BE LARGE QUANTITIES OF AID FROM COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. NORTH VIETNAM HAD APPARENTLY AGREED TO DELIVER SUPPLIES TO SALA PHOU KHOUN BUT NO FACILITIES EXISTED THERE NOR WAS THERE ANY LABOR FORCE WHICH COULD HANDLE THESE COMMODITIES. I ASKED WHETHER HE HAD BEEN APPROACHED IN REGARD TO USING SOLDIERS AS LABORERS. SISOUK SAID THAT THIS MATTER WORRIED HIM ALSO. THE UTILIZATION OF SALA PHOU KHOUN AS A TRANS-SHIPMENT POINT WOULD GIVE THE PATHET LAO/NVA INDIRECT CONTROL OVER THIS IMPORTANT ROAD JUNCTION. IN HIS VIEW, SOMETHING MORE SENSIBLE WOULD HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT. I ASKED WHETHER CONSIDERATION MIGHT NOT BE GIVEN TO CREATING TWO TRANS-SHIPMENT POINTS, ONE IN THE PL ZONE AND ONE IN THE VIENTIANE ZONE, USING VILLAGES WHOSE POPULATION MIGHT FIND EMPLOYMENT IN THE WAREHOUSES WHICH WOULD BE REQUIRED. I NOTED THAT THE QUANTITIES REQUESTED WERE IMMENSE AND COULD AMOUNT TO THOUSANDS OF TRUCKLOADS. I ALSO POINTED OUT THAT WESTERN AID DONORS, AND PARTICULARLY THE U.S., WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS IN ORDER NOT TO DUPLICATE COMMODITIES BEING PROVIDED BY SOCIALIST COUNTRIES. SISOUK AGREED.

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5. EVENTS IN SAM NEUA. SISOUK ASKED ME WHETHER I HAD ANY INFORMATION OR OPINIONS ON THE LENGTHY STAY OF PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG AND OTHER PATHET LAO LEADERS IN SAM NEUA. IT APPEARED TO HIM THAT SOME KIND OF HIGH LEVEL POW-WOW MUST BE TAKING PLACE. HE EXPRESSED THE SINCERE HOPE THAT THE PL WERE STRUGGLING WITH SOME KIND OF INTERNAL PROBLEM. I SAID THAT WE HAD NO INFORMATION BUT LIKE HIM WERE SURPRISED AT SOUPHANOUVONG'S PROLONGED DISAPPEARANCE FROM

THE POLITICAL SCENE HERE.

6. PHOUMI'S RETURN. SISOUK ASKED WHETHER I KNEW WHEN FONMIN PHOUMI WOULD BE ARRIVING IN VIENTIANE. I SAID THAT THE LAST I KNEW, PHOUMI WAS IN MOSCOW AND THAT WE HAD NO INFORMATION REGARDING HIS ARRIVAL. SISOUK SAID HE UNDERSTOOD PHOUMI WAS PRESENTLY IN PEKING AND WOULD PROBABLY BE STOPPING IN HANOI BEFORE HE RETURNS.

7. STRIKES AND DISTURBANCES. SISOUK SAID THAT HE EXPECTED FURTHER STRIKES AND DISTURBANCES TO TAKE PLACE. THE STUDENTS WERE BACK AT SCHOOL AND UNDER PATHET LAO GUIDANCE WOULD SURELY BE HATCHING SOME FURTHER MISCHIEF. I SAID THAT I SHARED HIS ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION BUT THAT AS I HAD MENTIONED EARLIER THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH BRING ABOUT STRIKES AND DISTURBANCES SHOULD NOT BE ASCRIBED SOLELY TO PATHET LAO INTRIGUES. THE GRIEVANCES WHICH HAD EVOKED STUDENT RIOTS LAST YEAR CONTINUED UNCHANGED. IT WAS REALLY UP TO THE VIENTIANE SIDE TO TAKE ACTION TO REDRESS THE FLAGRANT INJUSTICES WHICH WERE THE ROOT CAUSE OF THESE DIFFICULTIES. SISOUK AGREED BUT AGAIN EXPRESSED HELPLESSNESS IN CONTROLLING PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS.

8. DEMOBILIZATION. SISOUK SAID HE HAD GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS TO THE STAFF TO PREPARE AN UPDATE BRIEFING ON FAR PERSONNEL STRENGTHS AND THAT HE WISHED TO MEET WITH GENERAL TREFRY AND ME ON THIS SUBJECT NEXT WEEK.

WHITEHOUSE

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NNN

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